

LET'S Talk

FALL 2004

HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

Taking Care of Yourself

Do you have a “to-do” list that seems to go on and on? Does it include not only chores and errands, but also items that help you take care of yourself? It should. Here are a few ideas.

- Plan a weekend of fun activities with your family. Include something active such as bike riding or hiking.
- Forgive someone you're angry at.
- Eat slowly. You'll eat less food and digest it better.
- Exercise your mind by reading a book, learning a new card game or trying a new hobby.
- Take an elderly family member, friend or neighbor to lunch. It will do you both good.
- Don't forget to schedule time for exercise. A brisk daily walk will give you energy and calm you.
- Set aside a daily “worry period.” Take 30 minutes a day to concentrate on what's bothering you and contemplate solutions — then free yourself from worry for the rest of the day.

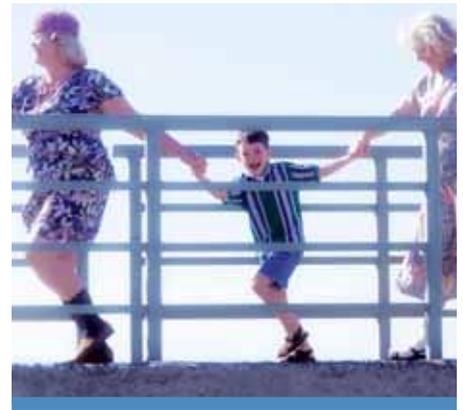
Secrets to Finding Happiness

CONTRARY TO THE BELIEF that happiness is hard to explain, researchers have identified the core factors in a happy life. The primary components are number of friends, closeness of friends, closeness of family and relationships with coworkers and neighbors.

“Studies also have shown that one of the best predictors of happiness is whether a person considers his or her life to have a purpose,” says David Niven, Ph.D., author of *The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People*.

After analyzing thousands of studies, Niven offers the following research-based secrets of happy people.

- **CULTIVATE FRIENDSHIPS.** Rekindle past relationships and take advantage of opportunities at work or among your neighbors to expand your friendship base.
- **ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE.** When an unhappy person must interpret the world, eight of 10 times he or she will see the negative in an event. When a happy person does so, eight of 10 times he or she will see the positive.
- **DON'T CONFUSE STUFF WITH SUCCESS.** You're neither a better nor a worse person because of the kind of car you drive, the size of your home or the job you have.
- **VOLUNTEER.** Research shows a strong consensus that volunteering contributes to happiness by creating an increased sense of purpose in people's lives.
- **SHARE OF YOURSELF.** Don't hold your feelings, thoughts and hopes inside. Share them with your friends and family.



- **ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE.** Satisfied people appreciate what they have and don't compare themselves to others.
 - **CHERISH ANIMALS.** Animals provide both immediate joy and long-term positive feelings. “Animals have so much to teach us about love,” says Niven. “The closer we get to animals, the more joy they give us.”
 - **DON'T FACE YOUR PROBLEMS ALONE.** “Problems can appear to be unsolvable,” he says. “But we're social creatures who need to discuss our problems with others.”
- Above all, remember that money can't buy happiness. One study of life satisfaction looked at 20 different factors that might contribute to happiness. Nineteen of the factors did matter. The one that did not was financial status.

Barbara Floria spoke with David Niven, Ph.D., author of *The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People*.

what's new

Late-Breaking Health News

EATING MORE FRUITS AND CEREALS MAY REDUCE THE RISK FOR HEART ATTACKS AND CORONARY HEART DISEASE. An analysis of studies of 91,058 men and 245,186 women found the dietary fiber in fruits, grains and cereals may reduce the risk for heart disease by lowering blood pressure and reducing cholesterol levels.

Researchers found for each 10 gm. per day more of fiber consumed from fruits and whole-grain cereals, there was a 14 percent decreased risk for heart attack and a 27 percent decreased risk of dying of coronary heart disease. The study results were published in *The Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Parents who smoke at home may be causing chronic asthma in their children. About 13 percent of parents of asthmatic children smoke — even though secondhand smoke is known to trigger asthma symptoms. And a new study shows these children are twice as likely as children of nonsmokers to have symptoms of asthma all year long.

The study was based on interviews with 896 parents of asthmatic children ages 2 to 12 by researchers in the pediatrics department at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

The study echoes previous research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which looked at children who had severe asthma symptoms more than 300 days per year. The CDC study found a strong connection to parental smoking among those with symptoms more than 300 days.



Aspirin may reduce breast cancer risk.

According to researchers at Vanderbilt University's Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center, the wonder drug that helps prevent heart attacks and strokes also appears to reduce women's chances of developing breast cancer.

The reduced risk was found for tumors whose growth is fueled by the hormones estrogen or progesterone. About 70 percent of women who develop breast cancer have this type of cancer.

Women in the study who took aspirin at least four times a week for at least three months were almost 30 percent less likely to develop hormone-fueled breast cancer than women who used no aspirin.

The researchers analyzed data on 1,442 women with breast cancer and a comparison group of 1,420 women without the disease. The link with aspirin was strongest in women who took seven or more aspirin a week.

The authors of the study said the findings are promising but that more research is needed before doctors can recommend women take aspirin to prevent breast cancer.

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Effectively Caring for Aging Parents

AS MORE AMERICANS LIVE LONGER, millions of middle-aged adults find themselves caring for their aging parents. It's not an easy task, especially for those with children still living at home.

"Care-giving can be so overwhelming, it's almost impossible," says Donna Cohen, Ph.D., coauthor of *Caring for Your Aging Parents*. "But it can be done if you develop specific skills and tailor them according to your parents' needs and your family's circumstances."

Don't Parent Your Parents

As your parents age and become frail or ill, resist the urge to regard them as children. Instead, think of care-giving as a family business and yourself as an executive with problems to solve.

For example: Your mother can't see well anymore but insists on driving. Instead of taking away her car keys, sit down with her and begin a dialogue. Say, "Mom, I'm worried about you. Aren't you worried about your driving?"

Don't Do It Alone

To manage care-giving effectively, seek help and advice from professionals and your siblings.

Work with physicians to understand your parents' health problems and the treatments they're getting. Talk to a pharmacist to learn the potential side effects of their medications and to make sure those medications are compatible.

Meet with your siblings over breakfast, not at the end of the day when everyone's tired. Describe the problem you're facing and share your feelings about it with them. Let them do the same.

Stay Optimistic

Within limits, there are things you can do now to maximize comfort and improve your parents' quality of life.



"Even holding someone's hand is a powerful way to ease pain and loneliness."

All told, "caring is more than loving," Cohen says. "It's a series of discreet skills that involve listening to your parents, making decisions about their needs and taking action, if necessary."

Don't Worry Needlessly



Are you worried? Or are you just concerned? The distinction is an important one. If you keep thinking about the problem and don't take action, you worry. If you take appropriate action, that's concern.

The key is change. If you can make a change for the better, then act on your concerns. If not, don't worry.

Worry means not accepting things you can't change, or not taking action on things you can change. People can learn that concern is a sign of caring and worrying is absolutely nonproductive. Here are some strategies to cut down on the floor-pacing:

- Set aside a "worry hour." Try putting off your worrying until a predetermined worry time. Then, use that time to write

about your fears. Writing them down will help you manage your worries.

- Face fears with logical arguments: "Even if it snows, I have snow tires on my car and flares all ready. I'm prepared; I'll be fine."
- Need a healthy outlet for anxiety? Exercise. It relieves tension and also helps control weight and strengthens your heart.
- When worries preoccupy you, try reading a soothing book or watching an upbeat movie.
- Catch worrying early. Anxiety tends to spiral.
- Cut the worry chain. Instead of focusing on the worst possible outcome, analyze the chain of events you've envisioned. Think of ways to solve the problem before it gets worse.

Coping With Major Life Changes

MAJOR LIFE CHANGES such as getting a new boss or having a baby affect all aspects of your life. Even positive changes can cause adjustment problems.

As a result, most people going through major life transitions can expect to feel varying levels of anxiety, stress, confusion and possibly self-doubt. But you can do things to make change easier on yourself.

Expect disruption

In the midst of change, many people expect to go on without missing a beat. But this attitude isn't realistic. "If you're starting a new job, don't expect to be up to speed immediately," says Cara DiMarco, Ph.D., author of *Moving Through Life Transitions With Power and Purpose*.

Focus on the known

To avoid needless worry and self-doubt about changes at hand, focus on the known elements that are present in the new situation.

Anticipate change

Change is inevitable, so it's helpful to plan for it. "Being prepared allows you to have more options and be aware of potential obstacles," DiMarco says. To establish several game plans, sit down with someone — an EAP counselor, a



career counselor or trusted friend — and use the person as a sounding board.

Pinpoint patterns

How do you move through change? What sorts of feelings and reactions tend to consistently recur? These are the kinds of questions to ask yourself when your life is stable so you can develop coping strategies when change happens.

Look for meaning

Even the most difficult changes can be useful. "You can learn from every experience," DiMarco says. You might have never chosen that life-changing experience or the lesson it taught you about yourself or the world, but if you can find the meaning or valuable outcome behind it, that experience will become part of your internal world, rather than an external agent acting on you. That increases your sense of personal control.

Every day, try to reserve five to 10 minutes for quiet time — perhaps to read a novel, write in your journal or stretch. Solitude helps recharge your body and calm your nerves.

Susan Evans, Ph.D., director, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program, New York Weill Cornell Medical Center, NY.

Borrow the phrase *Mi arrangio* from the Italians to help stay calm in tense situations. The phrase means "I'll make do," and it helps Italians avoid pessimism and send themselves "can-do" messages when the going gets rough.

*Raeleen D'Agostino Mautner, Ph.D., author of *Living La Dolce Vita*, Sourcebooks.*

Use your good china more often, perhaps for pizza night with the family. Light a few candles, put on some soft jazz and serve up the slices on your best dishes. Doing so will help you celebrate the simple joy of being alive.

*Susyn Reeve, author of *Choose Peace and Happiness*, Red Wheel/Weiser.*

Displaying fresh flowers in your home every week will help relieve tension and soothe your soul by celebrating beauty. If you can't afford a fresh bouquet weekly, a single bloom also will do the trick.

Woman's Day, 1633 Broadway, 42nd Floor, New York, NY 10019.

These healthy snacks will give you an energy boost: a teaspoon of peanut butter on each of four saltine crackers (180 calories), two tablespoons of honey on a medium banana (233 calories) or an 8-oz. serving of plain, low-fat yogurt with one-quarter cup of raisins (251 calories).

Kristine Clark, Ph.D., R.D., director of sports nutrition, Pennsylvania State University, University Park.

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